

Some Misconceptions Regarding the Sikhs

Misconception 1: “The Sikh religion is a blend of Islam and Hinduism or it is a sect of Hinduism.”

Truth 1: Sikhism is a unique revealed religion. It is not a blend of religions nor is it derived from any other religion. Guru Nanak Dev Sahib Ji started a new faith.

Misconception 2: “Anyone who has a turban and a beard is a Muslim from the Middle East.”

Truth 2: Sikhs are required to keep their head covered at all times. The turban is donned by a Sikh to cover the hair and head out of respect to God. The turban (1) maintains the dignity of the hair (Kesh), (2) protects the head, and (3) is a Spiritual Crown reminding a Sikh that he or she sits on the throne of consciousness, committed to higher principles.

Misconception 3: “In Sikhism, women have different rules than men.”

Truth 3: The tenets of Sikhism apply to all Sikhs, regardless of whether one is a Sikh man or a Sikh woman. Sikhism demands the equal treatment and involvement of men and women.

Misconception 4: “Sikhs drink alcohol and enjoy boozing parties.”

Truth 4: The Sikh faith cannot be judged on the basis of the Panjabi community. Sikhism is not something one can be born into, it is a decision one makes to become a Sikh and receive Amrit initiation. Sikhs are strictly forbidden from drinking or promoting alcohol or any other intoxicants.

Misconception 5: “All Sikhs are Indian.”

Truth 5: Sikhism is a religion. Indian is a nationality. Those Sikhs born in the United States, Canada, UK or any other place adopt the nationality of that country. Sikhism, as a religion and way of life spans any such geo-political boundaries.

“The One True Lord Abides Within All”

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Answers for the Seeker

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Who are Sikhs?

Sikhs are a people sharing common religious, social and political institutions. Twenty five million people worldwide identify or associate themselves with the Sikh faith, making it the fifth largest world-religion. Word "Sikh" means disciple of the True Perfect Guru. A Sikh is a person whose sole faith consists of belief in One God and who follows the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, the present Guru of Sikhs.

Sikhism is a monotheistic faith, which was founded by Guru Nanak Sahib Jee (1469 - 1539) and shaped by his nine successors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in South Asia. Sikhism is not a sect of Hinduism or Islam, or synthesis of these two faiths.

Who and what is a Guru?

For Sikhs, the "Guru" is the exalted master who shows the way to enlightenment and union with God. There were 10 Gurus in the human form from Guru Nanak Sahib Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib Ji who developed the faith and manifested the completed form of the Sikh community. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee (the Divine Scripture), the scriptural embodiment of over two centuries of spiritual revelation and instructions became the eternal Guru of the Sikhs, ending the human lineage of Guru.



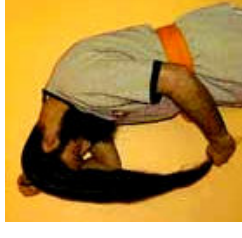
Sikhs consider the revelation contained within the Sacred Scripture to be the living Word of God, communicated directly through the enlightened Gurus and Saints who had experienced God. Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji teaches through Divine Baani (Words of God) that is set to a formal system of Sikh classical music. In the compilation of the Sikh Scripture, the Gurus included the revelations of devotees of God who were born in a diverse socio-economic, caste, and religious backgrounds, however all shared the universal religion of Guru Nanak Sahib Ji and experienced God through which they received revelations.

Sikh Articles of Faith

Sikhs display their commitment to their beliefs by wearing the Sikh articles of faith. The five external items of the Sikh faith each begin with the letter 'K' and are referred to as the 'Five Ks'. Amritdhari (initiated) Sikhs wear this distinct uniform to maintain their physical, moral and spiritual development. The 5 K's are:

Kesh (hair) covered with keski (turban)

Sikhs do not cut or forcibly remove any hair from any parts of the body to maintain natural form. Hair is neatly tied in knot above head and covered by a small turban, washed regularly, kept clean and protected.



Kanga is a wooden comb kept together with knot of hair on head. It is used to keep hair neat and tidy. Kanga is a reminder to maintain cleanliness and keep thoughts pure.

Karha is a circular iron bracelet worn on both wrists, worn to remind Sikhs actions and that they are bound and Guru. It is also symbolizes unity, strength of God.



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Kirpaan resembles a sword and is worn by initiated Sikhs (male and female). Kirpa means 'Mercy' and Aan means 'Honour'. Kirpan is used defensively only, as a last resort if all other means to defend fail. It also symbolises truth and justice.

Kachhera is cotton underwear with cord string worn much like under shorts. Practically it covers the body and ensures a Sikh is always ready and dressed modestly. It is a symbol of high moral character.



Sikh Insignia

The Sikh flag carries the insignia known as 'Khanda'. It is comprised of:

- Khanda (double-edged sword in centre symbolizing Immortal God, as well as justice and liberty)
- Chakar (circle symbolizing eternity of God and equality)
- Miri (sword on left-hand side symbolizing political authority)
- Piri (sword on right-hand side symbolizing spiritual power)



Do Sikhs have to pray everyday?

Sikhs can pray and meditate as much as they like when and where it practically suits them. The basic daily routine of a Sikh is to wake up before sunrise and after bathing, meditating upon the Divine-Name (Naam) revealed through the Guru in order to see the divine light of God within one's self and others. Morning daily prayers (Nitnem) follow this. Then in the evening, and at bed/night time a Sikh reads prayers. Every Sikh daily prays for the wellbeing of everyone by saying "O' God, in your Name, shower your blessings on everyone". Sikhs are expected to become and remain God-conscious with every breath and live their daily life in accordance with the Guru's Teachings (Gurmat).



What is the significance of Turban?

Turban is a mark of visual identity, which conveys royalty, grace and uniqueness. The turban represents complete commitment. It is made up of cotton fabric and is about 3-6 meters long. Practicing Sikh men and women both wear the turban. It is a spiritual crown reminding a Sikh that he or she sits on the throne of consciousness, committed to higher principles. Practically, it keeps the hair clean, and protects the head and *Dasam Dwaar* (spiritual energy gate on top of the head). The turban is not a hat and should not be referred to as one. It cannot be casually taken on and off. It must be carefully retied each time it is removed. It is considered a grave insult to touch or forcefully remove the turban.



Why don't Sikhs cut their hair?

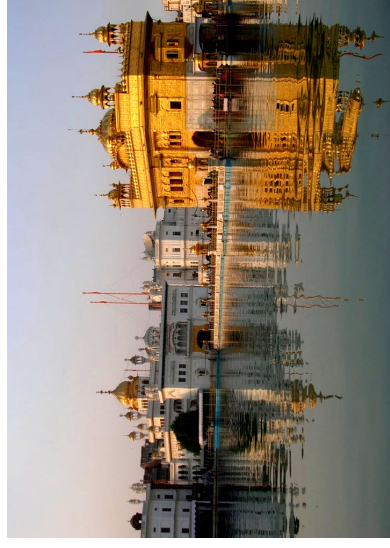
Sikhs maintain long unshorn hair (Kesh) as an act of acceptance of God's Will and living as nature intended, sustaining him or her in higher consciousness. Keeping unshorn hair is one of the basic requirements for a Sikh. Unshorn hairs are a marker of Sikh identity. The hair is sacred due to the fact that spiritual energy abides within each and every pore of hair on the body. The hairs are like electrical wires, which preserve, carry and vibrate energy. When one chants & meditates the Divine-Name (Naam), each hair vibrates, and therefore each hair is sacred as it acts like tongues which repeats the Name of God. Sikhs do not forcibly or intentionally remove any hair from the body but maintain clean hair with proper washing; tying and keeping them covered are requirements for a Sikh.

What is God according to Sikh belief?

According to the Sikh belief, there is One God who is all omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. God is the sole Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. He is beyond birth and death. He is both merciful and compassionate. He is beyond fear and enmity. He is self-illuminated. All our possessions are a result of His grace. The Sikhs call God 'Waheguru', meaning the most 'Wondrous Lord'.

What are core Sikh beliefs?

According to the Sikh belief, a Sikh must worship only God. Daily prayer and devotion to God and His Creation is required. Every one has equal status before God.



Sri Darbaar Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple, is located in Amritsar, Panjab.

Sikhism promotes the unity of God, universal love, equality and brotherhood of humanity, strict moral conduct and the rejection of the caste system, any distinction made for class, religion, race, or gender, idol worship, superstitious belief and inferiority of women. The Sikh goal is to end the cycle of birth, death and reincarnation, and unite the separated individual soul with the Universal Soul (God). The only way to attain this goal is through living the teachings of Gurus and repeating and meditating the Divine-Name (Naam) revealed through the Guru.

Are Sikhs prohibited from anything?

In Sikhism there are 4 cardinal sins (Bajjar Kurehats). Sikhs should not:

- Dishonour the hair (i.e. cut, trim, wax, pluck or dye any bodily hair)
- Have an intimate relationship outside marriage
- Use tobacco (or any other intoxicants)
- Eat *Kutthaa* (killed animal, viz. meat, fish & allied products)

Sikhism identifies 5 vices, which a Sikh must regulate and control. These are *Kaam* (lust/desires), *Krodh* (anger), *Lobh* (greed), *Moh* (emotional attachment) and *Ahankaar* (ego).

Do Sikhs have any human spiritual leader?

Sikhism does not have a clergy and all human beings are capable of realizing God. In 1699, the tenth Sikh Guru manifested the Order of the Khalsa to establish a society dedicated in the face of all odds to practicing the essential Sikh values. The physical authority of leading Sikhs was bestowed upon Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee and the Sikh Nation (Khalsa Panth), represented by selected five initiated Sikhs. These five Beloved One's should be fully committed Sikh believers initiated through a special ceremony, Amrit Sanchaar.



Where do Sikhs worship?

A Sikh place of worship is called 'Gurdwara', which is open to visitors, irrespective of their religion or gender, at all times. The common translation of the term as temple is not satisfactory, as Sikhism possesses no sacrificial symbolism. Sikhs have neither idols nor altars in their holy places. They have no sacraments and no priestly order. The essential feature of a Gurdwara is the presiding presence in it of Sikh Sacred Scripture, 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee', living Guru of the Sikhs. Hence the name Gurdwara (*guru* + *dwara* = the Guru's Door).



The main function of the Gurdwara is to provide Sikhs with a meeting-place for collective worship through 'Keertan', the collective singing of God's praise through the Shabads (Sacred Hymns) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee, and seeking support and guidance from the Guru. The Gurdwara also serves as a community centre, a school, a guesthouse for pilgrims, and a base for local charitable activities. Since the Sikh faith does not have an ordained clergy, public worship can be lead by any competent initiated male or female Sikh.



An essential part of any Gurdwara is the Langar (free kitchen). The Guru designed an institution in which all people would sit on the floor together, as equals, to eat the same simple food. It is here that all people high or low, rich or poor, male or female, all sit together to share and enjoy the food together, expressing the ideals of equality, sharing, and the oneness of humanity.

What is 'Naam'?



A great stress is given on Naam Simran (remembrance of Naam) in Sikhism. 'Naam' refers to the 'Divine-Name' revealed by Guru Nanak Sahib Jee. Naam is also the 'Divine Presence' everywhere, supporting all things at all times - in today's language we could say the energy structure or power of the whole Universe. Essentially it is the presence of Waheguru, which is inside us, and supporting absolutely everything, which is manifested in the Divine-Name given by the Guru to the seeker.

Naam is something to Jap (chant), reflect and contemplate through which Naam becomes woven in the heart of the devotee and Waheguru becomes imprinted on the heart of the devotee. There is nothing in this world, which equals the value of the Divine-Name. The Lord and His Name are identical. They are one.



Naam Simran (remembrance of Naam) is the only way to attain unity with God. Guru Nanak Sahib Jee established God's golden rules for leading a pure and pious life. He preached the concepts by practically enforcing them in his life first.

A Sikh is required to lead a virtuous, pure and pious life. Always remembering and repeating the Divine-Name with full concentration, breath by breath, can attain this virtue. Naam will awaken the consciousness, and create love and affection for all those who are created by God. It is strongly believed that a pious person would be compassionate and contended. He will aspire to serve the needy. He will have no enmity with anyone, as he knows that

God lives in every human being. To serve His Creation is to serve God and remember Him day and night. The mortal can merge with God by living in Him, by dying in Him, singing his Divine Praises and loving Him.

